

# UPCOMING EVENTS

**Returning Citizens Career Fair  
October 3, 2022**

**Holiday Gift Project  
October - December**

**For more info, go to our website:  
[www.berksconnections.org](http://www.berksconnections.org)**

# RETURNING CITIZENS CAREER FAIR



**Volunteer opportunities are available.**



The main goal of the Pardon Project of Berks County is to assist individuals with a criminal record who have served their sentence and are seeking a pardon of their records. The Pardon Project connects eligible applicants with trained volunteer Pardon Coaches to assist them in completing the pardon application and aid them in their journey.

To begin the pardon application process, or to see if you are eligible, email [PardonMeBerks@bcspreentry.org](mailto:PardonMeBerks@bcspreentry.org)

To learn more about becoming a volunteer Pardon Coach, email [BerksPardonCoach@bcspreentry.org](mailto:BerksPardonCoach@bcspreentry.org).

**NEW**



**A LIFE IMPROVEMENT BUSINESS<sup>SM</sup>**



## SUCCESS STORY

Jeremy was referred to BCPS for the first time in 2015. During his initial period with us, he struggled with compliance, and after a couple of months, his case was closed. In 2020, he was once again referred to BCPS. Similar to 2015, Jeremy struggled to be compliant with program requirements. By the end of 2021, he had hit rock bottom. But this only inspired him to change his life around. Since January of 2022, Jeremy has fully committed to recovery and on being the best version of himself that he can be.

Berks Connections/ Pretrial Services

**"I always say that "when the pain of remaining the same becomes greater than the pain of change, change becomes welcome." I think that's where I was at. I was almost dying. I had to lose everything and go through all that pain to get to where I am at today. And I am grateful for everything I've been through. I am filled with all this gratitude and tenacity and drive to keep pushing forward.**

*~Jeremy Geissler*

During Overdose Awareness Month, Jeremy ran a 5k in 27 minutes and 26 seconds for NOT ONE MORE, an organization that raises awareness for the prevention of drug overdoses.

Jeremy completed the growth track classes at Spring Valley Church, which met for 6 hours on Saturdays. At the age of 43, he got baptized for the very first time. For the past few months, he has been working at Progress Rails in the panel shops area. On June 6th, he

started attending RACC to obtain an associate's degree in addiction studies. Additionally, he finds time in his busy schedule to attend a Mindset Mindfulness group with his wife in the evenings.

Jeremy would like to volunteer and share his insights into recovery in hopes that he may be able to help someone find the freedom he has found and not be a slave to an active addiction.

**"Being able to show up for my sons and hearing them say "I'm proud of you" is just an awesome feeling. Being able to go to work every day and then coming home is just crazy and awesome. My life is so full.**

*~Jeremy Geissler*



## Berks Connections/Pretrial Services

19 N 6TH ST - 4TH FLOOR  
READING, PA 19601  
484-260-3860  
[BERKSCONNECTIONS.ORG](http://BERKSCONNECTIONS.ORG).

Do you want to support BCPS?  
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**DONATE NOW!**



## FORTY-EIGHT YEARS LATER

James is one of the 300 individuals age 60 or older arrested between 1965 and 1980 that was sentenced to life imprisonment in Pennsylvania. But he always hoped that one day he would walk out from behind the prison walls as a free man.

Through his prison-based activism, James sought to reform excessively punitive sentencing policies. He asked the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing to allow rehabilitated seniors 65 or older who are serving a life sentence and have completed at least 35 years of that sentence, or who have reached the age of 60 and served at least 40 years of that sentence, the chance to petition the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole for release consideration.

James was 19 when he committed the robbery and fatal shooting which resulted in his incarceration. Because of a heroin addiction, it was put forth for him to serve 8-20 years. But in the end, he served 48 years.

On March 5, 2021, the Board of Pardons unanimously voted to recommend James' application for commutation to Governor Wolf for his signature. James walked free on March 26, 2021.

Last September, James graduated from our R3 Program, Cohort 22.



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I feel very blessed to have been able to make it out of prison alive. I thank Governor Tom Wolf and the PA Board of Pardons for giving me a second chance at life, and thank the R3 staff for helping me to make a successful adjustment back in to society. It feels so good to be free!

~James, R3 Graduate

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The Reentry Employment Development Initiative (REDI) groups are back! These groups are open to all of our clients and focus on discussing reentry and workforce development topics. Topics include, but are not limited to, the importance of networking, job retention, how to put yourself in a position for advancement, how to handle time-gaps in your resume, and how to answer tough interview questions about your past. Many clients use these groups to discuss past personal interview experiences and to learn how they can implement these new tools learned in the classroom in their job search.

## REDI WORKSHOPS



Ruby Martin was inducted in as the 2022 Life Improvement Ambassador. Paul J. Hoh Life Improvement Awardees included Bob Williams, County Probation and Parole Chief (ret.), Safe Berks, Alice Moyer and West Lawn UMC, New Castle Lawn and Landscaping, and ABC Keystone and ABC Eastern PA. Receiving the newly established Kip Frasso Outstanding Transformation Award were Benjamin Marrero-Rivera, Hamilton Newton, and Paul Zenone.

## AWARDS BREAKFAST HIGHLIGHTS

BCPS's Annual Awards Breakfast was held on April 19th, and had a record number of nearly 420 attendees!

It was kicked off with Hamilton Newton, former client and 2022 awardee, reading the children's book, Stone Soup. Just like in the book, each ingredient contributed by a community member made the perfect pot of soup in which they all could enjoy, he shared how each opportunity presented to him started a RIPPLE EFFECT that changed the course of his life. Hamilton's personal growth, from rock bottom in a cell to a radio personality and founding member of The Forge, personifies BCPS's vision of a better community because people with justice involvement have the tools and support they need to succeed.



## \$1.2 MILLION - UNITED WAY GRANT

In April, the United Way of Berks County awarded a 1.2 million dollar 3-year grant that will allow BCPS to operate Reentry Works.

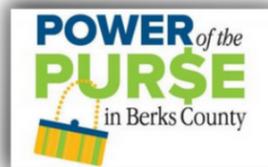
Reentry Works expands BCPS workforce services to all individuals in Berks County with current or past justice system involvement. The program is designed to help clients become reliable and successful employees to help address issues of unemployment and underemployment of the justice involved. The program uses a case-managed approach and creates individualized employment plans for our clients. The program's curriculum includes skill, education, and experience assessments, financial literacy, employment preparedness, computer labs, and employer recruitment.



Funding for this grant is through a \$10 million gift United Way of Berks County received from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott.

Making a decade-long dream a reality!

## POWER OF THE PURSE GRANT - \$10,000



BCPS was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Power of the Purse. These funds will be used towards removing obstacles to employment and education for women with justice involvement. More often than not, many of our clients cannot accept new job opportunities due to issues with transportation. At BCPS, we provide bus passes and taxi and Uber/Lyft vouchers, as well as other items needed to start a job such as an identification, birth certificate, work boots, and tools. Additionally, this grant will enable our clients to cover basic and urgent needs, including cell phone minutes – so they can receive the call from an employer offering them a job.



## COMMUNITY PARTNER

Thank you to The Forge for their suit donation for our R3 graduates. Looking good and feeling good before a job interview is key to excelling at an interview. With these suits our clients will be able to look their best while looking for new job opportunities, or whenever a suit would be appropriate. These suits will also be tailored to ensure our clients present their best selves forward. Thank you to Ebony McNeil and Hamilton Newton for making this possible.

The Forge anticipates this as an ongoing donation for each of the future graduating R3 cohorts.

Thank you, to the gentlemen of The Forge!



## THANK YOU LEADERSHIP BERKS!

BCPS was fortunate to be chosen to work with United Way's Leadership Berks team to create marketing content for the Pardon Project of Berks County. They created 5 videos, including an overview of the program, applicant eligibility, what to expect as an applicant, what to expect as a Pardon Coach, and a pardon coach's testimony, as well as a tip sheet for Pardon Coaches.

After graduating on June 26th, each Leadership Berks participant is required to sit on a board of directors for a nonprofit in Berks County. One of our team members, Leonette Stocker, joined the BCPS board, and two of the participants are continuing with BCPS as volunteer Pardon Coaches!

Thank you for your efforts, Leonette Stocker - Albright College, Ricky O'Leary - Albright College, Richard Schlamowicz - Riverfront Federal Credit Union, Shirley Chapin - United Way of Berks County, and Courtenay Dillard - Penske Transportation Solutions.

## MOTIVATED TO CHANGE

Stephan, an R3 graduate, attended our spring Returning Citizens Career Fair with his Human Resources representative Erin Hartnett, from Kymera International/Reading Alloys, to help promote their employment opportunities.

During the R3 program, Stephan had heard about a job at Kymera, where he could earn up to \$19 an hour. It was the highest starting pay he had ever heard of! A representative from Kymera attended his R3 graduation ceremony, where Stephan was presented with the offer of employment. Stephan remembers being told it was going to be hard work, and that provided him further motivation. He vowed he would work hard so he could earn that rate. And he did just that!

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"In school, I never got to join the ROTC because I was on a "different lifestyle path". Now I have a chance to CHANGE MY LIFE! BCPS was amazing! They gave attention to what I was going through in life and wanted to help me to move forward."  
~Stephan, R3 graduate

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Stephan initially rode the bus to work, getting off at the closest stop, one and a half miles away, and then walking the remainder. He put in long, physically taxing 12-hour days. Stephen shared, "I made it a point to get to work no matter what because it got me to the point where I am at now. When things were not going well, I just remembered the lessons from my cognitive classes and it kept me going. Being at the [Berks Connections/Pretrial Services] Career Fair is my way of giving back to the community and to BCPS."

